

# California University JOURNAL

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The University's academic community showcases research, scholarship, creative activity and application at the third annual Strike a Spark conference on April 26 in the Convocation Center.

## Robots Return for SWPA BotsIQ

For the fifth consecutive year, Pennsylvania high schools and career centers will bring their custom-built robots to the Convocation Center for gladiator-style competition.

The 12th annual Southwestern Pennsylvania BotsIQ Finals will be held April 28-29 in the Cal U Convocation Center.

Students from more than 60 school districts are expected. Admission is free, and the family-friendly event is open to the public.

BotsIQ draws on students' knowledge of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM), as well as project management and public speaking.

Students spend months designing and fabricating their robots and practicing to take them into battle, where the judges look for aggression, control, damage and strategy.

Manufacturers and other sponsors work side by side with mentors, schools, teachers and parents to encourage interest in STEM and connect students with employers, workforce training and higher education.

In addition to designing and building the remote-control robots, BotsIQ competitors complete extensive documentation, just as they would in an industrial setting.

The Pittsburgh Chapter National Tooling and Machining Association

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## Conference to Strike a Spark

Cal U showcases the research, scholarship, creative activity and application of its learning and teaching community when the Center for Undergraduate Research and the Faculty Professional Development Center presents the third annual Strike a Spark conference, from 9 a.m. - 3:15 p.m. April 26 in the Convocation Center.

Across campus, students and faculty conduct research, hone their scholarship, engage in creative expression, practice their skills and apply their knowledge.

Students and faculty regularly develop new ideas, methods, processes

and products of various kinds within and beyond their disciplines. This conference provides an opportunity to share those innovations with the campus community and the broader public.

Student presentations may consist of individual or class projects, capstone experiences, or senior/graduate theses. A panel of judges will evaluate the students' presentations, and prizes will be awarded for outstanding work.

Faculty presentations may focus on innovations in their scholarship presented for a broader audience, or spotlight pedagogical and/or educational innovations, including the application of

high-impact practices in teaching and learning.

Dr. Eric (Rick) Oches, professor and chair of the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences at Bentley University, in Waltham, Mass., will deliver the conference's keynote address at 11:30 a.m. in the south conference wing. The title of his address is "Developing Transdisciplinary Skills for Solving Wicked Problems."

Oches' teaching and research interests have focused on Earth's recent climate history and the human and environmental response to climate changes in the past, present and future.

Field research has taken Oches to diverse localities across Europe, and to

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Dr. Eric (Rick) Oches



Big Daddy Kane will discuss his career at Cal U's 12th annual Hip-hop Conference on April 28.

## Grammy winner Big Daddy Kane to Headline Hip-hop Conference

Grammy-award winner Big Daddy Kane will discuss his revolutionary hip-hop career at Cal U's 12th annual Hip-hop Conference.

Kane, along with Pittsburgh radio personality Mike Dean from WAMO-FM (100.1), will present "Hip-hop Don't Stop: The 40-Year Evolution of DJing, Emceeing and Radio" at 4 p.m. April 28 in Morgan Hall Auditorium.

Kane is known for his lyrical ingenuity and innovative live performances. He won a Grammy in 1991 for Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group for "Back on the Block," earned several gold albums (500,000 units sold) and received a VH1 Hip Hop Honor in 2005.

He has collaborated with many artists, including

Public Enemy, Ice Cube, Heavy D and Patti LaBelle.

Dean was a board operator at WAMO before becoming an on-air personality. He has interviewed a who's-who list of celebrities, from 2 Chainz to Rick Ross to Redman and more.

Now in its 12th year, Cal U's Hip-hop Conference is organized by Dr. Kelson Edmonds, a professor in the Department of History, Politics and Society. Edmonds is an expert in African-American studies. Under his leadership, conference topics have included social and political activism; the criminal justice system; and sports, hip-hop and race.

Admission to the Hip-hop Conference is free; the public may attend. Metered parking for visitors is available in lots 11 and 17 on campus.

## Alumna to Scholars: 'Seek Opportunities'

Reflecting on the journey that led to her distinguished career in law, Cara Davis '00 advised Cal U's Presidential Scholars to seek opportunities that might be right around the corner.

Davis delivered the address at the University's 2017 Honors Convocation, held April 1 in the Convocation Center.

Davis is the founder and principal of the Davis Legal Group, a law firm based in Belle Vernon, Pa., that specializes in oil and gas law.

A native of Brownsville, Pa., she earned her Cal U bachelor's degree in political science and then received a Juris Doctorate in 2003 from the Duquesne University School of Law.

In 2011, Davis expanded her law firm into Ohio and West Virginia. The multi-state oil and gas practice continued to grow with addition of institutional hedge funds and global land management companies as clients.

At the convocation, she shared a parable about an African farmer who sells his farm and leaves his family as he searches unsuccessfully for diamonds. Meanwhile, the man who buys the farm discovers that the land is one of the most productive diamond mines on the continent.

"The point of the story is that we often dream of fortunes or success to be made elsewhere," said Davis. "Instead, we ought to be open to the opportunities that are around us."

A star scholastic basketball player,

Davis injured her knee in her senior year of high school but fulfilled a dream by playing two years for a NCAA Division I college basketball team.

"At the age of 17, many of the things that I thought I was going to achieve were gone in a blink," she said. "I was a lot like the farmer, in that I accepted the scholarship (to the Division I school) but did not fit in well or allow my knee proper time to heal."

She transferred to Cal U, where both her parents — Cal U trustee James '73 and Martha '74 — had attended.

"Unlike the first farmer, I was going to make my own path. I quickly realized that transferring to Cal U was one of the best decisions I ever made," Davis said.

At Cal U she met her husband, Brian Teslovich '95. They have been married 17 years and have three children.

"Had I never transferred here, none of this may have ever happened," she said. "Each of us is right in the middle of our own acre of diamonds."

Davis credited Cal U for providing her with both the education and the confidence to start her own firm. She also is an instructor in Cal U's Department of Professional Studies, where she teaches about legal topics in the online bachelor's degree and certificate programs in land management, and in the undergraduate and graduate legal studies programs.

"If you want to succeed, you should strike out on new paths rather than traveling the worn path of accepted success," she said. "Continue to build on



Attorney Cara Davis '00 addresses Presidential Scholars at the 2017 Honors Convocation.

the foundation you've received at Cal U and never lose your love of learning."

Before Davis' address, University President Geraldine M. Jones congratulated the nearly 300 undergraduate and graduate students who were honored at the convocation.

In addition to meeting other requirements, undergraduate Presidential Scholars must maintain a grade-point average of 3.25 or higher, and graduate students must have a GPA of 3.75 or higher.

She also recognized two faculty members who received the 2017 Presidential Distinguished Merit Awards

— Dr. Cassandra Kuba, honored for excellence in service; and Dr. John Nass, honored for excellence in teaching.

President Jones reminded the Presidential Scholars that all of their experiences, good and bad, will help them grow in maturity, judgment and wisdom. She encouraged each of them to wear their Presidential Scholar pins at Commencement.

"Scholars, you have the knowledge and talent to achieve incredible things," the President said. "If you can realize the full measure of your abilities, I have no doubt you will change the lives of the people around you for the better."

## Stigma Impedes Recovery, Specialists Say

The PARC, Cal U's Prevention Awareness Recovery Center, aims to erase the stigma of addiction and help college students take pride in overcoming drug and alcohol abuse.

Two Cal U educators explained the program earlier this month at a free conference focused on addictive disorders presented on campus with support from the Washington County Drug and Alcohol Commission.

Rachel Michaels, Cal U's alcohol and other drug (AOD) education specialist, and her predecessor Robert Mehalik, now the director of Cal U's Office for Students with Disabilities, delivered the keynote presentation, "Addiction in College: Changing the Culture."

"We have to change the negative stigma of addiction and educate on addiction recovery," Michaels said. "We need to help students be proud of being in recovery instead of ashamed or embarrassed."

Cal U is the first university in Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education, and one of only 250 nationwide, to have a designated recovery center for students.

Michaels and Mehalik explained that PARC is a stress-free lounge open to students who are recovering from alcohol or drug abuse, and to anyone who wishes to learn more about ways to receive or offer help.

There is a need for the service, they said. According to Ohio State University's Collegiate Recovery Community, about 2,000 U.S. college students ages 18-24 die each year due to alcohol-related injuries, and drinking is a factor in 700,000 student assaults.



Rachel Michaels, Cal U's alcohol and other drug education specialist, speaks at the Conference on Addictive Disorders on April 7 in the south wing of the Convocation Center.

On the other hand, 92 percent of students involved in a college recovery program maintain their rehabilitation.

"If students stay clean, they stay in school," Michaels said. "The challenge is to show them they are not invincible. ... We have the services and helping professionals they need right here on campus."

Mehalik emphasized the important role of the students and professionals in the audience.

"As you know, advocacy is huge in what we do," he said. "We all must be proactive and collaborate to tackle the perceptions and stereotypes" about addiction.

Audience member Rebecca Hudock, a drug and alcohol therapist with

Southwestern Pennsylvania Human Services Inc., regularly counsels young adults. Many of them worry about maintaining their recovery if they go to college.

"It was important to be here, learn about all the resources and pick up current information. It has to be a team effort to help people."

Following the keynote presentation, prevention specialists Tammy Taylor, Jody Bechtold and Dr. Dave Delmonico joined Cal U's Dr. Rueben Brock, Dr. Rosalie Smiley, Dr. Emily Sweitzer and Dr. Thao Pham to lead breakout sessions that examined a variety of addictive disorders.

Donna George, the AOD Coalition coordinator for the State System, joined Michaels in organizing the conference.

## Strike a Spark Returns

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Argentina, Yemen and both the midcontinental United States and Alaska.

Immediately following the keynote address, the winners of the Serene Leadership Institute Essay Contest will be announced.

Students were required to compose a 1,500-word essay using the academic writing format of their choice.

At 12:15 p.m., a panel discussion, "How to Get Involved in Research," will take place featuring faculty, students, and alumni from various disciplines who will share their stories how they engaged in research, scholarship, and creative activities at Cal U.

University President Geraldine M. Jones urges the campus community to invite alumni and University friends, members of the local business community, teachers and students from area schools, and any others who might be interested in the Strike A Spark conference.

"Our campus becomes more vibrant, our collective outlook more positive, when students and teachers are actively involved in scholarly, creative and exploratory activities," the President said.

Questions about the conference can be directed to Paul Hetler, FFD coordinator, at [hetler@calu.edu](mailto:hetler@calu.edu), or Gregg Gould, director of the Center for Undergraduate Research, at [gould@calu.edu](mailto:gould@calu.edu). For more information and a conference schedule, visit [calu.edu/events/2017/strike-a-spark](http://calu.edu/events/2017/strike-a-spark)



Alumnus Rontez Miles '12 overcame many obstacles on his route to becoming a safety with the New York Jets of the National Football League.

## Graduate Describes Path to NFL

Alumnus Rontez Miles '12 overcame many obstacles on his route to the National Football League.

A safety with the New York Jets, the former Vulcan standout encouraged Cal U students to use the same inner drive that kept him focused on his goal of making the NFL and creating a better life for himself.

A two-time Associated Press First-Team Little All-American and FSAC-West Defensive Player of the Year, Miles returned to campus on April 4. He spoke in Keystone Hall to students in Dr. Kelton Edmonds' course, African-American History Since 1877.

"Write your own story and don't let anybody tell you what you can't do," Miles told the students. "Take advantage (of opportunities) and don't waste your time here. You have to live in the moment and know yourself."

One of 11 siblings, Miles traveled from place to place during his childhood as his parents wrestled with personal issues. By age 8 he had lost his hair to alopecia areata, an autoimmune disease.

"Kids can be cruel, but I knew at the age of 8 that I was going to play in the

*"Write your own story and don't let anybody tell you what you can't do. ... You have to live in the moment and know yourself."*

— New York Jets safety Rontez Miles

NFL," said Miles, who went on to play scholastic football at Woodland Hills High School.

"Drugs and friends were everywhere (when I was) growing up, and football was my outlet."

Miles briefly attended Kent State University before coming to Cal U, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in liberal studies and a minor in justice studies.

The 2009 PSAC-West Freshman of the Year, Miles finished his collegiate career ranked fifth in school history with 257 tackles, which included 156 solo stops, the most ever by a Cal U defensive back. He produced 10 interceptions, 23.5 tackles for loss, four sacks and four blocked kicks, while also scoring two touchdowns on special teams and registering a safety.

Miles signed with the New York

Jets as an undrafted free agent in 2013, and he played with the practice squad before being promoted to the active roster. He sustained a serious leg injury in practice in 2014, underwent life-saving surgery for compartment syndrome — excessive swelling and bleeding — and returned from injured reserve the following year.

In 2016 he was the Jets' seventh leading tackler; he made 57 tackles while playing in all 16 games for the Jets.

Despite realizing his goal of playing pro football, Miles said he is far from satisfied.

"I can manage my life, but I'm not rich. I'm not a Pro Bowler, and I want to wear a (Super Bowl) ring. Motivation is everywhere."

Edmonds praised his former student's leadership.

"I always encourage my students to participate, and I could always count on Rontez to get things stirred up in class," said Edmonds. "Not only was he a leader on the field, but that also transcended into the classroom."

"That's how we all should look at education today: This is your education

— go after it and grab hold of it."

## Campus BRIEFS

### Students Prepare for The Big Event

Cal U students will give back to the community during The Big Event, starting at 8 a.m.

April 29

Cal U's Student Government Association and the Center for Volunteer Programs and Service Learning have been teaming up since 2007 to lead students in their quest to lend a helping hand around California Borough.

Hundreds of Cal U student-volunteers will work at various community locations and perform tasks for local residents, including window washing, painting and general yard work.

At last year's event, nearly 400 volunteers pitched in to make a difference for Cal U's neighbors and local organizations.

All volunteers are urged to sign up on OrgSync. For more information, email [stufgov@calu.edu](mailto:stufgov@calu.edu) or [volunteer@calu.edu](mailto:volunteer@calu.edu).

### Student Pottery Sale May 1-3

The spring student pottery sale will be held from 10 a.m.-8 p.m. May 1 and from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. May 2-3 in the Ceramics Studio, near Vulcan Hall.

Providing an ideal gift opportunity for Mother's Day on May 14, the sale features handcrafted mugs, bowls, pitchers, jars and vases of all sizes. Members of the Student Pottery Association create all the handmade items.

The sale is open to the public, and complimentary refreshments will be served.

For more information, contact the Department of Communication, Design and Culture at 724-938-4182 or Professor Richard "Duke" Miecznikowski at 724-938-4083 or [miecznikowski@calu.edu](mailto:miecznikowski@calu.edu).

### Women Trailblazers

Barbara Barnes, a retired sprinkler fitter from North Strabane Township, Pa., stands beside a portrait of herself in the Mandelino Library Gallery. Barnes' portrait was part of the "Hard-Hatted Women" exhibition on display during Learn to Earn Week, April 3-7.

Organized by the women's studies program, the weeklong series of activities focused on women leaders, breaking barriers and taking control of one's professional image. Learn to Earn was made possible through support from an American Association of University Women Campus Action Project Grant. Sponsors were the Office of the President, the Office of the Provost, the women's studies program, the Department of Social Work, and the Linda and Harry Serene Leadership Institute.



### International Dinner set for April 30

Cal U's 2017 International Dinner will take place at 6 p.m. April 30 at the Performance Center inside the Natali Student Center.

This year's event will have a Russian theme. Dancing and other activities are planned.

Cost is \$5 for students, \$10 for the public. Doors open at 5 p.m. Tickets can be purchased at the door or in advance by emailing Rachel Lim, International Club president, at [lim2312@calu.edu](mailto:lim2312@calu.edu).

Sponsoring the dinner are the Office of the President, and the International and Modern Language and Cultures clubs.

## Theater Season Ends at 'Clybourne Park'



Students (from left) Brittany Martin, Katie Cerda and Kitty Hoffman rehearse for 'Clybourne Park,' which will be performed April 27-29 in Steele Hall's Mainstage Theatre.

The Department of Music and Theatre concludes its spring theater season with the award-winning satire

### *Clybourne Park*

Performances are scheduled at 7 p.m. April 27-28, and at 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. April 29 in the Mainstage Theater in Steele Hall.

Winner of both the Pulitzer Prize and the Tony Award for Best Play, *Clybourne Park* is a razor-sharp satire about the politics of race.

Playwright Bruce Norris set up *Clybourne Park* as a pair of scenes that bookend Lorraine Hansberry's iconic drama *A Raisin in the Sun*, the story of a black family that purchases a house in a white neighborhood.

*Clybourne*'s two scenes, set 50 years apart, take place in the same modest bungalow on Chicago's northwest side.

In 1959, Russ and Bev are moving out to the suburbs after the tragic death of their son. They inadvertently have sold their house to the neighborhood's first black family.

Fifty years later, in 2009, the roles are reversed: A young white couple buys the lot in what is now a predominantly black neighborhood, signaling a new wave of gentrification.

In both instances, a community

showdown takes place, pitting race against real estate with this home as the battleground.

*Clybourne Park*, first produced in 2010, contains subject matter that may not be suitable for young children.

"I was introduced to *Clybourne Park* five years ago, and I knew that someday I would get a chance to play with these characters, challenge my actors, and push my audiences' awareness regarding their sense of humor and personal boundaries," said director John Paul Staszal '03, assistant professor in the Department of Music and Theatre.

"The themes are current, historical, and always relevant. *Clybourne Park* is a beautiful play that will make you laugh, cry, cringe, hurt and hate — a perfect emotional rollercoaster."

The production is open to the public. Ticket price is \$12 for adults, seniors and children. Cal U students with valid CalCards pay \$0 cents, plus a \$5 deposit that is refunded at the show.

For ticket information, or to charge tickets by phone, call the Steele Hall Box Office at 724-938-5943.

## Senior Ponders Rugby Future

Erica Long joined Cal U's women's rugby club in Fall 2015 to meet new friends and try something different.

Less than two years later, she has become a successful player on the national level — and she's considering professional play once she graduates in December with a degree in criminal justice.

Earlier this semester, Long was selected for the National Small College Rugby Organization's National 7s team. It's the second time she's been chosen.

The NSCRO Women's 7s Select Side is a program created a year ago in partnership with Penn Mutual. While allowing players from smaller schools to compete together at the highest level, the program increases the visibility of talented players and provides them with another pathway to national competition.

Early last month Long joined teammates from across the country at the Las Vegas Invitational, the largest amateur rugby tournament in North America.

Seeded fifth in the 16-teams women's college division, her NSCRO/Penn Mutual team won four of its games and finished third overall. The team defeated select teams from Quebec, Utah State (twice) and New Mexico State before falling to eventual tourney champion University of British Columbia in the semifinals.

Long scored four tries throughout the three-day competition and created scoring opportunities for teammates.

In June 2016 Long helped the 16th seeded NSCRO All-Stars finish in fifth place at the Mutual Collegiate Rugby Championships in Philadelphia, Pa.

"Playing for Cal U's rugby club has made this all possible," said Long, who is now a team captain for Cal U and coach Brittany Marnell. "I've met so many people, and it's opened up some doors for me."

Long noted that she was one of only four NSCRO/Penn Mutual players who had competed together in Philadelphia last summer.

"I met these girls on a Tuesday, and by Thursday we were playing together against teams that had been



Senior Erica Long has enjoyed friendships and playing success at the national level since joining Cal U's women's rugby club in Fall 2015.

playing together for a while. That's unheard of! But we came together and did well."

She said that once the players arrive for a tournament, NSCRO has a full itinerary and the team is together for the entire trip.

Because she played well in both tours, Long caught the eyes of coaches from USA Rugby Women's Premier League teams. Several have contacted her about playing after she graduates.

Penn Mutual's role as a sponsor has been advantageous, too, Long added.

"They're super-involved in our success as a team and constantly reiterate to us that when we graduate, they'd love to have us. So that's definitely an avenue to explore after I graduate."

## Robots Return for BotsIQ

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brought BotsIQ to the region in 2005. Today, SWPA BotsIQ has grown to 10 times its original size and counts more than 5,000 students among its "alumni."

"BotsIQ... focuses on the engineering, design and manufacturing process, not just the battling competition," says Bill Padnos, executive director of Southwestern Pennsylvania BotsIQ.

"This interest in how things are made supports the future of high-tech manufacturing. These students make up a job-ready, trained workforce pipeline."

About 85 percent of BotsIQ competitors say they aspire to careers in STEM-related fields.

The opening ceremony will take place at 9 a.m. April 28, with bouts beginning at 9:30 a.m.

The April 29 opening ceremony starts at 8:45 a.m., with bouts beginning at 9:05 a.m.

New this year, a free STEAM Showcase will be held from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. April 29 in conjunction with the SWPA BotsIQ finals at Cal U.

Area school districts will highlight their programs in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. Intermediate Unit 1's Mobile Fab Lab also will be on hand.

During Saturday's competition, parents can also participate in a free information session to learn more about careers in manufacturing. The session will be held from 12:30-1:15 p.m. April 29 in the Convocation Center's north conference wing.

The championship bout is scheduled for 6:15 p.m. April 29. Awards will be announced after the final rounds.

SWPA BotsIQ is managed by New Century Careers and affiliated with the National Robotics League, which holds its national competition May 19-20, also at the Convocation Center.

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